

Short Story of the Day.

MRS. RIODAN'S THORWALDSEN

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Every auctioneer in town knew her and expected to stumble upon her, whether at the fashionable Broadway sales or in the dimmest corner of the ghetto, and never one of them had a good word for her.

Mrs. Riodan's parsimony was as notorious as it was unnecessary, but it was her hobby to acquire bric-a-brac at ridiculous bargain figures. Had the original Venus de Milo been offered to her at \$500,000 she would have held out for \$499,999. Nothing gave her such exquisite pleasure as to escort a guest to some dim niche in her much decorated house and murmur with a gentle, cooling inflection:

"So glad you like it, dear. I purchased it for a song. Such a bargain! You wouldn't believe it if I told you."

In vain had wily auctioneers endeavored to entrap the lady in some of their clever schemes. She invariably scented danger and stopped bidding just when they saw the lamb led to slaughter. A group of these worthies who had been called in to examine a superb collection of art goods drifted into a cafe to lunch together, and Mrs. Riodan's hobby came up for discussion.

A wideawake chap recently from Chicago listened to the tales of her shrewdness and finally remarked:

"Gentlemen, I wager a supper party for this crowd that if I have charge of that sale I will not only force Mrs. Riodan to purchase a certain article which I shall select, but she will pay at least 50 per cent more than it is worth."

The supper wager was quickly taken, and cash bets were added, the young auctioneer taking all offers. In less than a week Mrs. Riodan commenced to receive mail regarding the sale of the famous Burton collection. Almost daily there arrived either an enticing circular or a simply engraved card reminding her of the date of the sale until she became actually excited over the prospect.

When the day arrived, Mrs. Riodan was among the first on the scene, but not earlier than two young men whose tastes in bric-a-brac seemed closely allied to her own. One of them, whose face was that of a student and whose garments in some indefinable fashion suggested foreign blood and the artistic temperament if not the calling, was especially interested in the display of bronzes.

Mrs. Riodan felt that here was a kindred spirit, and she listened delightedly to his criticisms of the collection and his easy chat of things he had seen abroad. He particularly dilated on the fact that to auction sales alone was he indebted for an opportunity to purchase rare bits of bronze, evidently his hobby.

"If one is really a judge of such things," he remarked, "there is absolutely no danger of being cheated and every chance of picking up a rare bargain."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Riodan, "a kindred spirit indeed!" And she strolled, with assumed carelessness, as close as possible to this connoisseur, thinking complacently of her five pieces of bronze, each picked up at an auction sale. Suddenly she

heard him of the artistic temperament utter an excited exclamation:

"By Jove, that is a gem!"

They had paused before a bronze statue not more than a foot in height, but exquisitely molded. It was a really fine production of Thorwaldsen's "Wrestler." With bated breath she fell back, as did the two young men, to study the figure more critically.

"Exquisite!" came to her in dulcet tones. "Worth five hundred, if it's worth a cent, or my opinion is valueless."

"A gem, worth a couple hundred," murmured Mrs. Riodan, and as she looked the muscles of the wrestler seemed to gleam in the uncertain light like buried gold.

The men made a note of the number and then moved on, but Mrs. Riodan still lingered. She would have that piece, for she had heard the artist remark as he turned away that no one in the room would probably realize the real value of that bit.

By the time the sale opened Mrs. Riodan was in a feverish state. The auctioneer rolled off his customary jargon, bidding went merrily on, but Mrs. Riodan heard nothing until the auctioneer reached the Thorwaldsen. Some one bid \$5, and Mrs. Riodan bestowed on the ignoramus individual a glance of scorn. The bids rose slowly, and at \$25 Mrs. Riodan entered the arena, and so did the young artist. Up, up went the figures until finally these two were bidding steadily against each other.

"One hundred dollars!" exclaimed the artist nonchalantly.

"One hundred and twenty-five!" snapped his rival.

The artist roused himself.

"One hundred and fifty!" The drawl had left his voice.

Mrs. Riodan hesitated.

"He wants it. He knows bronzes, and so do I," she thought.

"Going, going, going!"

"One seventy-five!"

The artist turned a troubled face toward his friend. They conferred anxiously. The auctioneer looked from one to the other. Mrs. Riodan felt her heart contract suddenly. She wanted that bronze. What was the artist going to do?

He shook his head. The auctioneer's hammer fell. The bronze was Mrs. Riodan's property, and, giving her address and settling the bill, she hastily left the room. An hour later, having completed her other shopping, she dropped into a fashionable restaurant, feeling that, having secured a bargain, she might treat herself to an exceptional luncheon. She had barely given her order when from behind a palm she caught tones that seemed strangely familiar, that drawling, dulcet note she had heard before. And what was he saying?

"It's a jolly little lunch, isn't it, Madge? And let me tell you I earned it. I haven't played a part since the dramatic club days at college, but I flatter myself I did quite well this morning. What I know about bronzes would not cover your visiting card; but, heavens, how the old lady did snap at the bait! One seventy-five, and she could get a brand new one for a hundred!"

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The next afternoon a couple of woman friends were taking tea in Mrs. Riodan's home, and one of them spied the Thorwaldsen.

"What a clever bit, Mrs. Riodan! And you've never shown it to us." The guest approached the figure and touched it daintily. "And of course you got it for a song. You always do, lucky creature!"

"Yes," murmured Mrs. Riodan, "for a song." Then she added under her breath as she passed the wafers, "But there were a few high notes in the song."